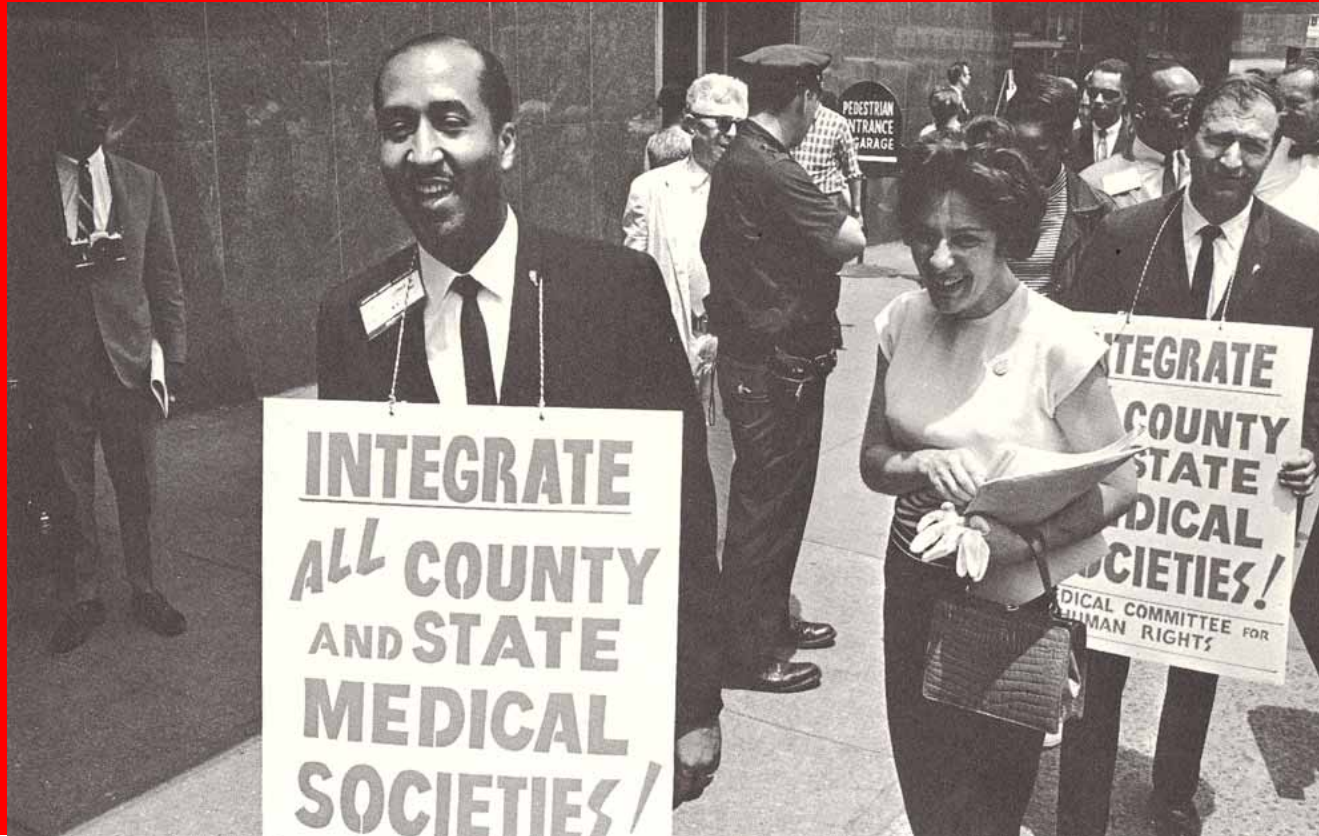


# African American Physicians & Organized Medicine: *Acknowledging our Painful Legacy*



The Institute for Ethics  
at the AMA



# Writing Group on the History of African Americans and the Medical Profession

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# African American Physicians and Organized Medicine, 1846-1968

## Origins of a Racial Divide

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**B**Y THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY, US physicians had formed 2 national associations: the National Medical Association (NMA) and the American Medical Association (AMA). This peculiar duplication reflected a profession segregated by race. The AMA was almost entirely white; the NMA predominantly black—founded in

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 COMMENTARY

# Achieving Racial Harmony for the Benefit of Patients and Communities

## Contribution, Reconciliation, and Collaboration

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Ronald M. Davis, MD

live up to the high standards that define the noble profession of medicine.

# History of Writing Group

- Independent panel
  - convened by AMA Institute for Ethics
  - support of AMA and NMA leadership
- Members selected by Institute for Ethics
  - additional members added by panel
- Neither NMA nor AMA leadership were asked to approve the panel members or their findings

# Goals of Writing Group

- Review and analyze historical roots of racial divide in American medical organizations
  - Avoid making moral judgments re: *intentions*
  - Emphasis placed on *results* of decisions
- All members stand by the historical facts presented

**Founding a United Society in a Divided Nation:  
The Antebellum Era**

# Race Relations in Antebellum Era

- A black healing tradition exists, covering a spectrum of training and practice, but...
- Chattel slavery in slave states
- Scientific racism common throughout US
  - A few challenged this view, including among AMA's founders (esp. John Bell)
- In North
  - 1847- David Jones Peck (1st African American to graduate from a US medical school, Rush)
  - 1854- John Van Surly DeGrasse (1st black member of Massachusetts Medical Society)

# The American Medical Association

- Founded in 1846 as a “National Medical Association”
- Renamed AMA in 1847
- Purpose:
  - Improve and standardize medical education
  - Establish common code of medical ethics
  - Promote profession’s interests, honor, respectability, knowledge, and usefulness
- Race not mentioned in early AMA records



# North-South Balance in AMA

- AMA maintained a pattern of North-South balance in...
  - Electing Presidents

# State Residency of AMA Presidents (1847-1860)

## North

- PA (1847)
- NY (1848)
- MA (1849)
- NY (1853)
- PA (1855)
- CT (1860)

## South

- SC (1851)
- VA (1852)
- TN (1857)
- DC (1858)
- MO (1854)
- KY (1859)

## West

- OH (1850)
- MI (1856)

■ – Slaveholding and Trading

# North-South Balance in AMA

- AMA maintained a pattern of North-South balance in...
  - Electing Presidents
  - Locating National Meetings

# Locations of AMA Meetings (1847-1860)

## North

- PA (1847)
- MA (1849)
- NY (1853)
- PA (1855)
- CT (1860)

## South

- MD (1848)
- SC (1851)
- VA (1852)
- TN (1857)
- DC (1858)
- MO (1854)
- KY (1859)

## West

- OH (1850)
- MI (1856)

■ – Slaveholding and Trading

# Southern Participation in AMA Meetings

Percentage of Delegates from Southern States when...

- AMA meeting was held in South
  - 30%, SC (1851)
  - 44%, VA (1852)
  - 67%, TN (1857)
- AMA meeting was held outside of South
  - from 2% - 14% of total meetings (1847-1860)

# **Medical Societies Membership**

# Importance of Medical Society Membership

- Professional Advancement
- Provided forum to
  - present papers
  - learn latest techniques and treatments
- One could call on colleagues for
  - Medical advice
  - Assistance in surgery

# Importance of Medical Society Membership

- Society membership often tied to
  - Referrals
  - Hospital admitting privileges
  - Licensure
  - Training
- Non-membership meant
  - Professional isolation
  - Fewer referrals
  - Limitations on sources of income
  - Limitations on educational opportunities



**Medical Society of the District of Columbia  
1869 - 1870**

# African American Physicians Denied Admission into Medical Society of the District of Columbia (1869)



Alexander T. Augusta



Charles B. Purvis

&

Alpheus W. Tucker

<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/ataugusta-01.jpg>

<http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/images/photo/MenMark/013/013.jpg>

## **African American Physicians Denied Admission into Medical Society of the District of Columbia**

- All 3 physicians were eligible for admission
- Majority of MSDC voted not to admit these African American physicians
- Rationale: The MSDC did not admit black physicians

## Senate Committee finds Medical Society of the District of Columbia Guilty of Racial Discrimination



Senator Charles Sumner

“The original object, as declared in the charter and constitution of the [MSDC] Society, was the promotion of medical science, which nobody can doubt is worthy of congressional care. But when the [MSDC] Society is transmuted into a social club, it assumes a different character; and if this is done in derogation of the equal rights of all, it becomes a nuisance and a shame.”

—*JAMA* 253(17) (1985): 2550

# **Senate Committee found Medical Society of the District of Columbia Guilty of...**

- Excluding qualified physicians “solely on account of color”
- Refusing to consult with black physicians who were “excluded on account of color”
- Excluding physicians from educational opportunities “on account of color”

# Outcome of Senate Investigation

- 1870 - Senate Committee drafts bill (S. 511), repealing charter of the MSDC
  - The bill was passed over several times
- 1871 - A similar bill (HR. 733) introduced in House of Representatives
  - The bill never reported out of committee
- 1892 - Congress found that the MSDC still refused to admit black physicians

**1870 AMA Annual Meeting  
Washington, DC**

# National Medical Society

- 1870- Augusta, Purvis, Tucker, and other DC physicians form National Medical Society
- The NMS was racially integrated
- The Medical Society of the District of Columbia requested that the AMA not seat the NMS delegation



# Charges Lodged by the Medical Society of the District of Columbia

The National Medical Society...

- “was formed in contempt of” the MSDC
- “attempted, through legislative influence, to break down” the MSDC

# The AMA Committee of Arrangements



Robert Reyburn

- Registered meeting attendees
- Committee challenged admission of Massachusetts Medical Society
  - b/c MMS admitted irregulars\*
- Minority report challenged admission of MSDC
  - b/c the MSDC granted licenses to irregulars\*

\* Irregular practitioners had not received a “regular medical education”

# The Delegations in Question

- Medical Society of the District of Columbia
  - All-white delegation
- Massachusetts Medical Society
  - All-white delegation
- National Medical Society
  - Racially integrated delegation

# AMA Committee on Ethics

- All issues of membership were referred to Committee on Ethics
- Members appointed by AMA President:
  - Nathan Smith Davis, Chair (IL)\*
  - Alfred Stillé (PA)
  - J. M. Keller (KY)
  - Henry F. Askew (DE)
  - J. J. Woodward (US Army)

\* The AMA's self-declared "Father"

# Recommendations of the Committee on Ethics

## Charges

- The MSDC licenses irregular practitioners
- The MMS admits irregulars as members
- The MSDC's charges against the National Medical Society

## Recommendations

- Admit delegation, because charges are “not of a nature to require the action of the [AMA]”
- Admit delegation, further investigation, even though “plainly in violation of the Code of Ethics”
- The Committee on Ethics was divided, 2 to 3...

# AMA Committee on Ethics: Minority Report

- Minority of Committee on Ethics:
  - Alfred Stillé (Spokesman, PA)
  - J. J. Woodward (US Army)
- Recommended inclusion of the NMS members because:
  - The NMS was “regularly organized”
  - The excluded physicians were “qualified practitioners of medicine”
  - There were “no sufficient grounds” for exclusion

**AMA Action: Tabled**

# AMA Committee on Ethics: Majority Report

- Majority of Committee on Ethics:
  - Nathan Smith Davis (Spokesman, IL)
  - Henry F. Askew (DE)
  - J. M. Keller (KY)
- Recommended exclusion of all NMS members because:
  - The NMS “used unfair and dishonorable means to procure the destruction” of the MSDC
  - Some members of the NMS were not licensed\*

\*N.B. Licenses were issued by the MSDC

**AMA Action: Adopted (vote: 114 – 82)\***

\* 36 MSDC members were allowed to vote

# Proposed Nondiscrimination Policy

John L. Sullivan (MA) offered the following:

- “*Resolved*, That no distinction of race or color shall exclude from the Association persons claiming admission and duly accredited thereto.”

**AMA Action: Tabled (vote: 106-60)**



# The AMA Convention Denies Charge of Racial Discrimination

Horatio R. Storer (MA) offered the following:

- “*Resolved*, That inasmuch as it has been distinctly stated and proved that the consideration of race and color has had nothing whatsoever to do with the decision of the question of the reception of the [NMS] delegates,...the report of the majority of the Committee on Ethics be declared, as to all intents and purposes, unanimously adopted by the [AMA].”

**AMA Action: *Adopted (vote: 112-34)***

# Delegations Denied Admission into 1870 AMA Annual Meeting

- National Medical Society\*
- Howard University Medical College\*
- Freedmen's Hospital\*
- Smallpox Hospital\*

\* Though some of these institutions had previously been admitted to AMA meetings, all delegates were members of the NMS and were thus excluded.

# Summary of 1870 Events

- AMA refused to adopt a nondiscrimination policy
- AMA excluded a delegation with black members
  - By stringently applying standards of collegial behavior
- AMA admits two all-white delegations
  - By leniently applying ethics standards
- AMA absolved itself of charge of racism

# National

# Medical Journal

EDITED BY

CHRIS. C. COX, M. D., LL. D.,

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How were these colored men who claimed admission to be excluded, and yet it be made to appear that they were not excluded on the ground of color?

Nothing less than this would please or satisfy the southern brethren and their sympathizers, and yet the thing was somewhat monstrous, and would need plausible excuse before others.

*NMJ* (1870): p172

This Association had been formed avowedly as the great sign-manual of demarcation between true, legitimate medicine and the "irregulars"—not a mere social or local compact, but as the great national idea of legitimate practice. It boasted itself as exclusive only of the false in science and character, and it seemed too great a slander on its avowed purpose and too big a blot and too bold for this advance guard of regular medicine, aspiring to be the great papal of orthodoxy, to propose tests for membership totally irrelevant to capacity or character.

But, alas! the "Asso" of 1870 makes a flank move on its sacred principles. It puts up new barriers to entrance, and brings ethnological distinctions to bear on science.

*NMJ* (1870): p177

The Association has unhar-  
nessed itself from its code of ethics...

*NMJ* (1870): p180

**AMA Develops an early “States’ Rights” Policy**



# Restricting Delegations

- Before 1874 - AMA delegates came from medical schools, hospitals, professional societies
- 1873 - N. S. Davis proposes that the AMA
  - Restrict delegations to state/local societies
  - Allow state societies to decide which local societies will be officially recognized by AMA

**AMA Action: Adopted in 1874**

# Forming a State-Based Federation

- 1874 decision turns AMA organizational structure into a state-based federation

## Effects:

- Since many state/local societies were racially exclusive, African American physicians were effectively excluded from the AMA